

Memorandum on Fulton Lewis Column of January 26, 1956

In the column of January 26, 1956 by Fulton Lewis, Jr., there are incomplete references to five statements or actions of Dr. James R. Killian, Jr., President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The following statement of facts attempts to place in more complete context these statements or actions.

First, the article states: "In April 1947, the Joint Legislative Committee on Rules of the Mass. General Court meeting in Boston, had hearings on proposed state legislation to ban members of subversive organizations from state employment. Killian filed a statement opposing the legislation, opposing compilation of a list of subversive organizations by the State Attorney General and opposing establishment of a state committee on subversive activities."

At the moment he has no recollection of writing or filing any such statement and can find no reference to it in his files. The archives at the State House are being searched, and you will be advised later if anything is found.

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Thirdly, the article states, "On April 15, 1949, the Communist Daily Worker published a story about the MIT head refusing to remove from the MIT faculty, Professor Dirk Struik, who had been named in court testimony as a party member. It quoted Killian as saying the removal of a university instructor for his personal political beliefs would be a violation of academic freedom."

In order to understand more fully the Struik case, many of the facts relating to it must be reviewed.

The Institute had been aware that Dr. Struik, Professor of Mathematics, held unorthodox political views but to the best of our knowledge he had not done anything illegal nor had he allowed his views to color his teaching, nor had we any evidence that he had sought to proselytize within the Institute's academic community. There was no occasion, therefore, to take official notice of the matter until April 1949, when Mr. Herbert Philbrick, a witness in the trial of eleven Communist leaders in New York, testified that Professor Struik had lectured before communist groups.

The Institute's legal counsel obtained a transcript of Mr. Philbrick's testimony and found in it no clear evidence that Professor Struik had advocated the violent overthrow of the government or other illegal action.

Further careful investigation by the Institute revealed no evidence that Professor Struik had failed to discharge competently and faithfully his duties as a professor of mathematics. He had not attempted to disseminate Communist doctrines at the Institute nor had he improperly influenced students or colleagues. At no time had he ever had access to classified

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information at M.I.T. He denied that he had committed any crime and the Institute concluded that he should be considered innocent of criminal action until proof of his guilt was offered by due process of law. It is not within the scope of an educational institution to try a defendant for a crime against the Nation or the Commonwealth.

On May 3, 1949, I issued a statement making explicit the Institute's policy regarding subversion of its faculty and staff members:

"Recent reports in the public press regarding the activities of Dirk J. Struik, Professor of Mathematics at M.I.T., call for a statement of the Institute's attitude toward Communism and toward freedom of inquiry.

"The Institute is unequivocally opposed to communism; it is also sternly opposed to the Communistic method of dictating to scholars the opinions they must have and the doctrines they must teach. M.I.T. seeks first a faculty and staff of thoroughly competent scholars and teachers of high integrity. Assuming this competence and integrity, it believes that its faculty, as long as its members abide by the law, and maintain the dignity and responsibilities of their position, must be free to inquire, to challenge, and to doubt in their search for what is true and good. They must be free to examine controversial matters, to reach conclusions of their own, to criticize and be criticized. Only through such unqualified freedom of thought and investigation can an educational institution, especially one dealing with science, perform its function of seeking truth.

"The Institute's attitude toward the charges which have been made against Professor Struik must be viewed against this background and in the light of these considerations. Professor Struik is an American citizen. As required in Massachusetts, he has taken the "teacher's oath" to support the constitutions of the United States and of the Commonwealth. He has only by implication been charged with illegal actions, and he staunchly denies that he has at any time committed acts that are improper for a loyal American citizen. The Institute has secured a transcript of Mr. Philbrick's testimony in New York and finds no statement in it charging Professor Struik with an unlawful act. He has also discharged competently and faithfully his duties as a professor of Mathematics. Careful investigation by the Institute has revealed no evidence which would indicate that he has sought to indoctrinate at the Institute his beliefs in regard to Marxism or improperly to influence students or colleagues.

"The Institute believes that Professor Struik, who denies that he has committed any crime, should be considered innocent of any criminal action unless he is proved guilty. The Institute feels that if criminal charges are to be brought against Professor Struik, they should be brought by the government and handled in orderly fashion by the courts.

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An educational institution has no competence to carry on a trial to determine whether a law has been broken.

"Should a member of our staff be indicted for advocating the violent overthrow of the American government or other criminal acts, or if the evidence of such actions were incontrovertible, immediate action would be taken which would protect the Institute and at the same time preserve his rights. If this staff member should be convicted of this charge, he would be discharged.

"The Institute also wishes to make it clear that it believes that the teacher, as a teacher, must be free of doctrinaire control originating outside of his own mind. He must be free to be critical and objective in his own way, and above all he must work in the clear daylight without hidden allegiances or obligations which require him to distort his research or teaching in accord with dictates from without. If a teacher were found to be subject to improper outside control in his teaching, the Institute would regard him as incompetent.

"The Institute believes that one of the greatest dangers of the present cold war and of the present fear of Communism is the danger that they will cause America to relinquish or distort or weaken basic civil rights. This may be a greater danger than the occasional impact or influence of a Communist.

"No American college or university has a more impressive record than M.I.T. of devotion to our national welfare or of wholehearted support of the ideals of American democracy. It has been the training ground for thousands of alumni who serve and strengthen our system of free enterprise and who vigorously uphold the principles of our free society. Its faculty serves the community, the state, and the nation in a spirit of complete dedication to the public service. I need only cite the Institute's war record and the major contributions it made through research and training to the national cause.

"I believe it is equally true that it would be hard to find an educational institution in which the students are so unanimously devoted to American ideals. They are too critical and independent to be easy marks for any special pleaders. The overwhelming majority of our students are so thoroughly imbued with their democratic heritage and with their responsibilities and privileges as American citizens that there is no danger of their being corrupted.

"The Institute proposes to deal with all charges of Communism or other ideologies in the light of these considerations and convictions."

J. R. KILLIAN, JR."

On July 25, 1951, Professor Struik was called before a subcommittee of the House Un-American Activities Committee as a witness. He refused to answer most of the Committee's questions, invoking the Fifth Amendment.

Later Professor Struik was questioned by officers of the Institute. He stated that he was an intellectual Marxist, that he was sympathetic to many of the Marxist doctrines which serve as the philosophical basis for contemporary Communism. He denied being a member of the Communist Party and denied being subject to its discipline. He denied that he had committed any act of disloyalty to the United States and denied that he had ever advocated the violent overthrow of our government or had participated in any conspiracy against it.

On September 11, 1951, Professor Struik was indicted by the Middlesex County Grand Jury on charges of plotting to overthrow the Government of Massachusetts and the U.S. by force or other illegal means. In accordance with the announced policy of May 3, 1949, the Executive Committee of the Corporation of M.I.T. immediately suspended him, relieving him of all duties and removing him from contact with students pending disposition of his case in the courts.

At its first regular meeting following the suspension, the Faculty of the Institute unanimously passed a resolution of approval of the Institute's actions in the case.

Professor Struik is still under suspension, awaiting trial.

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Referring now to the statement from the Daily Worker quoted by Mr. Lewis. It is true that Professor Struik was not removed in the sense of being discharged. He was, however, suspended and has remained so ever since. Dr. Killian cannot possibly know whether or when he may have said that a university instructor should not be removed on account of his personal political beliefs. He is certain, however, that he never said or intended that such beliefs should include an advocacy of the illegal principles of the Communist party.